Describe the practice proposed for recognition and list its objectives. Detail how the practice is innovative, how it promotes high student achievement and how it can be replicated.

Math...A Backpacking We Will Go is a practice that is designed to link math with reading and writing and to bridge the gap between school and home, as well as child and parent. The practice centers around a particular colored backpack. (We use blue, red, yellow and green.) Four children are chosen every Tuesday to bring home a Math Backpack. The backpack is filled with a variety of math materials. Inside you will find a Welcome Card that introduces the family to the skill that is being introduced or reviewed in math class that week. For example, the card may read: Welcome To the Wonderful World of Patterns. It would then give a brief description of a pattern and explain what is being learned. Also enclosed is a literature piece (story) that will unveil the skill to the family. Story props can be found (in a ziploc bag attached to the back of the story) to help the parent and child retell the story. Further searching will produce hands-on-activities, games, manipulatives, as well as activity cards. A "Math Madness" journal is packed inside so each family member can write an entry describing their favorite activity. Last, but not least is the Inventory Check Card. This lists the name and quantity of each item. The backpack is returned on Monday, thus giving the teacher a day to check and replenish the pieces. The process is then repeated on Tuesday with four new children. The story and all written directions are done in English and Spanish.

Objectives of proposed practice:

- *Children will review the skills that are being introduced in the math and language arts curriculum.
- *Parents will be able to see first hand what their child is learning and have the opportunity to review the skills with them.
- *Parent and child will be interacting together to perform the tasks at hand as well as reading the stories together, thus getting first hand knowledge of their child's capabilities.
- *Families will become supportive of each other and begin to build and support their child's self-esteem.

This practice will allow the parent/family to become actively involved in their child's learning process. It will also allow the family a chance to know what skills are being addressed or reviewed in the math and language arts curriculum. Because there is such a strong parent/family involvement, it will make the child more aware that their family is concerned and involved in their education. It will also show the family how all subject areas are truly interconnected and interdependent. This program will help them to understand that math, reading and writing can be learned in a fun and non-threatening environment. This practice will boost the child's self-esteem and help improve communications between the child and parent as well as the home and school.

2. Describe the educational needs of students that the practice addresses and how they were identified. List the Core Curriculum Content and Cross-Content Workplace Readiness Standards addressed by the practice and describe how the practice addresses the standard (s).

The children in the classroom where this practice was implemented attend an urban elementary school designated as Title I because of the number of families with low incomes. It is located in a predominantly Spanish speaking neighborhood and the majority of the children come from a home where Spanish is the dominant language. The majority of the children come from a single parent home or are being raised by grandparents or other relatives. Since the school has instituted the practice of looping, these students and their parents are with me for tow years.

I begin the year observing the difficult adjustment period in both kindergarten and to a lesser degree in first grade, and I am able to see them spread their wings and fly successfully out of first grade. Being with them for two years has given me the advantage to the many difficulties both my students and their parents encounter. It became apparent that the homework assignments were either not done, or were done by older siblings or by the parents themselves. Stories that were supposed to be read at home were not done because mom or dad forgot or the claim was made that there was not enough time. Notes were not read, signed or returned. The children complained that they did not have the supplies necessary to do the homework, so a homework emergency kit was given to each. Parents that needed to come to school did not come and student absenteeism was high.

I felt I needed to institute a practice that would help parents understand the importance of getting involved to a greater degree in their child's education. I had to teach them how to "help" with homework. But communication was lacking and a language barrier stood in my way. I selected math as a content area for the project because the language of math is universal and the nature of problem solving can lead to collaborative learning and the use of manipulative and calculators using real life activities that could prove to be great fun. I began to have parent-child activities twice a month. Notes went home in both languages and family math workshops were held to address the needs of parents and students. I needed to bring the classroom into the home, so that everyone could benefit from the learning that would take place. Thus the birth of "Math...A Backpacking We Will Go!

The activities included in the Math Backpacks address the following Core Curriculum Content Standards and Cross Content Workplace Readiness Standards:

Show an interest in solving math problems
Solve simple everyday math problems
Draw math ideas to figure out a problem
Explain math ideas with manipulative
Understand math as part of other disciplines
Make educational guesses and test them & use estimation/testing techniques
Identify repeated patterns
Create numeric patterns
Demonstrate number sense/Understand more than, less than
Compute using money
Use problem solving strategies
Use self-management strategies by completing assignments
Begin developing workplace readiness skills

3. Document the assessment measures used to determine the extent to which the objectives of the practice have been met.

The assessment of the practice "math... A Backpacking We Will Go" is an ongoing process. The assessment includes formal assessment in the form of teacher made math tests and unit tests correlated to the mathematics curriculum. Students achieved the math Kindergarten and first grade competencies of the district.

In addition, these other assessment practices showed evidence of the success of the program:

- Teacher observations and checklists;
- Parent observations and checklists;
- Parent/Teacher journals are used to exchange comments. This assessment instrument insures ongoing communication between home and school related to homework assignments or backpack activities;
- Parent and teacher conferences were scheduled once a week and attendance increased;
- Teacher used the comments on the journal in the development of math center activities, math center recall and problem of the day;
- Parent comments were used in the development of large and small group instruction;
- Children are better able to assess themselves during their cooperative learning groups and portfolio meeting sessions;

The culminating activity at the end of the year is a Math Carnival. Each parent/child team is responsible for creating a game or activity that will help in the review of one or a combination of math skills that were addressed during the kindergarten or first grade school year experience.

Parental involvement and student attendance also improved as a result of the practice.